

CONSERVATION AREAS IN EAST DORSET

ALMER



Foreword

This document is based upon work carried out in 1994 to define the special qualities of the Conservation Area that was subsequently published as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the East Dorset Local Plan (see paragraphs 6.118 to 6.131 and accompanying policies BUCON 1 to 4 of the East Dorset Local Plan adopted 11 January 2002).

The text and illustrations of the original publication have been revised and updated to reflect any significant changes that have taken place in that time since the original survey and appraisal of the area were undertaken.

The appraisal provides guidance to those elements and characteristics that should be taken into account when considering proposed developments and other works requiring consent. The information contained in the appraisal will be treated as a material consideration by the Local Planning Authority when considering planning applications.

The revision does not extend to reviewing the boundaries of the designated area. This work will be undertaken between 2006 and 2010 in parallel with the Local Development Framework process, as currently programmed.

The maps used in the document are based upon the Ordnance Survey mapping currently available to the Council.

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Introduction

The hamlet of Almer lies on the northern edge of the Drax Estate, off the A.31, in the Parish of Sturminster Marshall and comprises, principally, St Mary's Church, Almer Manor and West Almer Farm.

In June 1990 it was considered that the historic and architectural importance of the Church and Manor justified the designation of a Conservation Area to protect their settings.

Setting

The hamlet is situated on flat land, surrounded by low hills and woods. There are long distance views to the south towards West Morden and to the north-east, resting on Westley Wood. The woods of the Drax estate provide a clear southern edge to the Conservation Area and form a good backdrop to the hamlet when viewed from the north. Small woods to the north and north-west of Almer, known as Legg's Clump and Manor Wood respectively, also contribute to the setting of the village and creates an element of enclosure in an otherwise open landscape.

St. Mary's Church



East Dorset District Council Policy Planning Division Supplementary Planning Guidance No.1 (September 2005)

Approaches

The main approach to Almer is from the A.31. There is an attractive view of the Manor and Church from the main road, visible between the boles of the roadside trees. The buildings and their associated treescape appear beyond a flat, grassy meadow. Leading towards the Church, the last vestige of a lime avenue skirts the west side of the meadow.

At the north side of the limes is an attractive pond which is more apparent in winter when the water level is high and foliage is absent.

It is then possible to appreciate the Church and Manor in greater safety than when on the busy trunk road. However the view of the Manor then tends to be more obscured by the surrounding trees.

The approach from Mapperton follows a narrow hedge-lined lane, that emerges directly in front of the Church entrance. There is then a rather disappointing rapid exit from the hamlet to the main road.

Scope

The boundaries of the Conservation Area are drawn to include much of the setting of the important group of Listed Buildings, when seen from the main viewpoint along the main road. Thus the fields immediately to the north and north-east are included, together with Legg's Clump and Manor Wood.

Buildings

The Church of St Mary the Virgin dates from the twelfth-century, but has been increased in size and rebuilt in succeeding centuries. However, parts of the original nave survive and the tower is fifteenth-century. The building has walls of ironstone rubble with limestone bands and dressings and roofs of tile and stone slates at the verges. The two nave windows are round-headed with plain keystones. The Church is of outstanding architectural importance.

Within the churchyard stands the remains of a Norman cross and a nineteenth-century table tomb, both of which are listed. The cross is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument. One-metre high walls surround the churchyard. Those on the north, east and south sides are of simple brick construction, but the wall on the west side adjacent to the road is of banded brick and flint and capped with decorative shaped brickwork. An iron arch, incorporating a lamp bracket, marks a simple entrance.

Remains of Cross



Almer Manor was built around 1600. Additions were made to the south wing soon afterwards, but the Elizabethan building has remained largely unaltered since. The building is faced with bands of limestone and flint, though some of the walls are of ironstone. The roofs are of tile with stone slate courses at the verges. The main front of the house faces away from the main road to the north-west. This features a two-storey semi-octagonal porch and a bay window of similar form, with transomed lights. Throughout the house are mullioned windows, many of which have been restored in recent years. This building is also of outstanding architectural interest.

The Manor has a low-key entrance, being approached via a farm road at the side of the Church. The main front is concealed behind trees and bushes on its northern boundary and can only be appreciated from West Almer Farm.

This consists of a farmyard flanked on two sides (and part of a third side) by traditional nineteenth-century barns, of mixed architectural merit individually, but important as a group. These include an old barn with a distinctive old plain-tiled roof, enhanced with lichen growth. Its former weather-boarded walls are now clad in corrugated iron sheets, painted black. Attached to this barn stands a nineteenth-century brick barn under a lower pitched roof clad in concrete tiles. This range of buildings is completed at the southern end, separated by the yard entrance, with a stable block that has been converted into living accommodation. This is constructed of brick under a half-hipped tiled roof with stone slate verge courses and features a small, hipped dormer on the front and back.

On the north and east sides of the farmyard stand other traditional single-storey brick and tile farm buildings. Outside the traditional ranges are three modern barns of contrasting shapes and sizes, but none has an overbearing effect on the old farm.

To the west of the Church is a well-proportioned modern house that faces the road. The two-storey building has a symmetrical front with a central porch. It is built of brick under a hipped slate roof and features a central chimney stack. Some of the former buildings on the site have been incorporated as a service wing at the rear. The vehicular access to the property is from the side which allows the front boundary hedge to remain intact, except for a small pedestrian gate.



Almer Manor

Spaces

The meadow between the main road and the group of listed buildings forms a vitally important setting for the hamlet that should be preserved in its present form, including the pond.

Other important spaces include the churchyard, informal gardens on the west side and a walled enclosure on the north side of the Manor respectively. Equally important to the character of Almer is the farmland that surrounds and permeates the tiny hamlet.

Trees and Hedges

There are two concentrations of trees within the Conservation Area. A line of big oaks trees stand along the main road, with sycamore, ash and beech below. These trees merge with an avenue of limes at the southern end of the lane to Almer. Another small group of limes occurs on the left-hand side at the northern end.

The second concentration occurs around Almer Manor where there is a mixture of deciduous trees and conifers. Strangely, there are no trees within the churchyard.

Streetscape

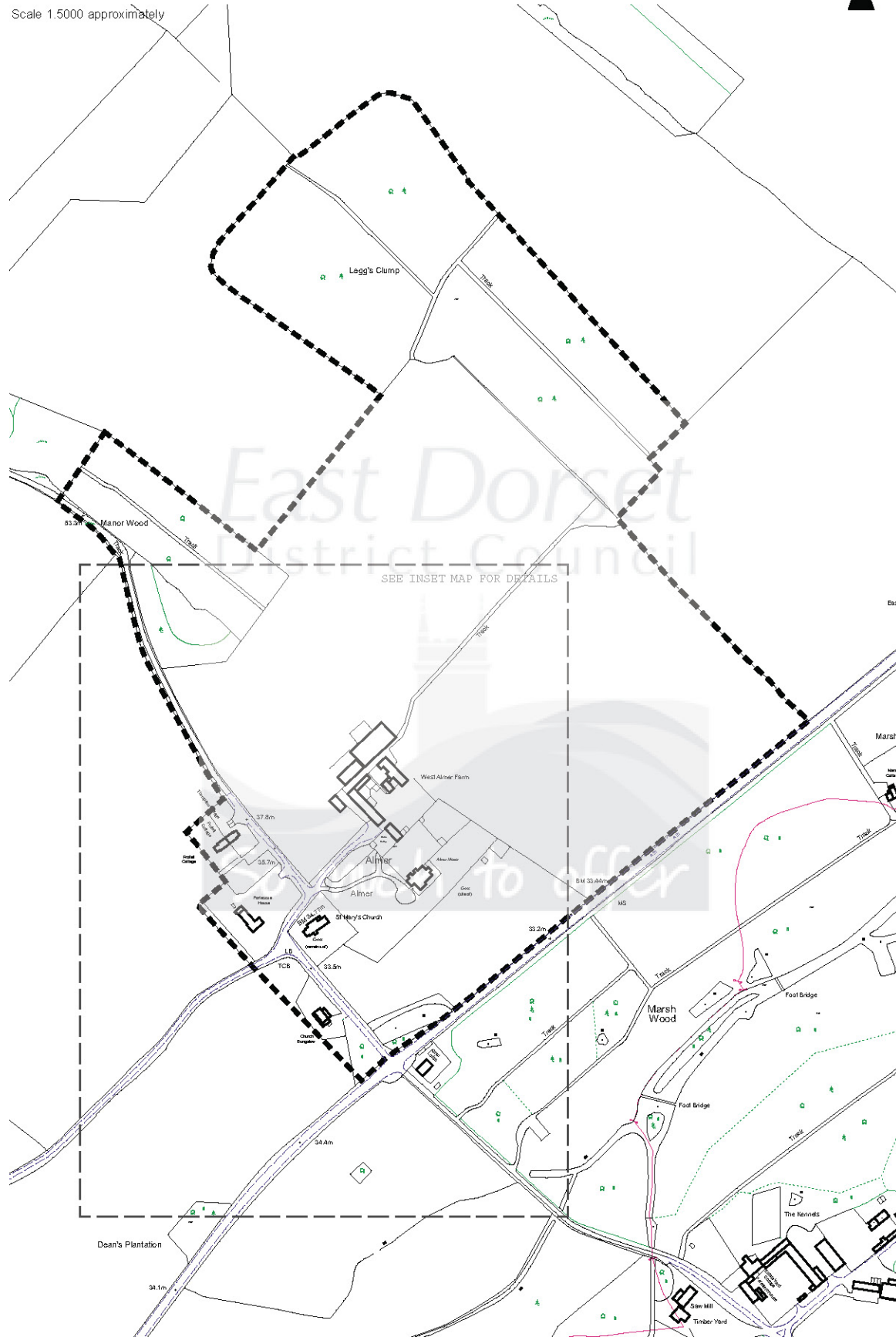
The approach road to the hamlet is wider than many rural lanes, perhaps due to the needs of agricultural vehicles to West Almer Farm. The verges on the farm road on the north side of the Church are severely affected by cattle trampling and by vehicles.

At the west corner of the churchyard is a telegraph pole from which wires radiate. Their visual effect is made worse by the absence of trees. On the opposite corner stands a Gilbert Scott telephone kiosk and an adjacent post-box.

Boundary of Almer Conservation Area

Scale 1:5000 approximately

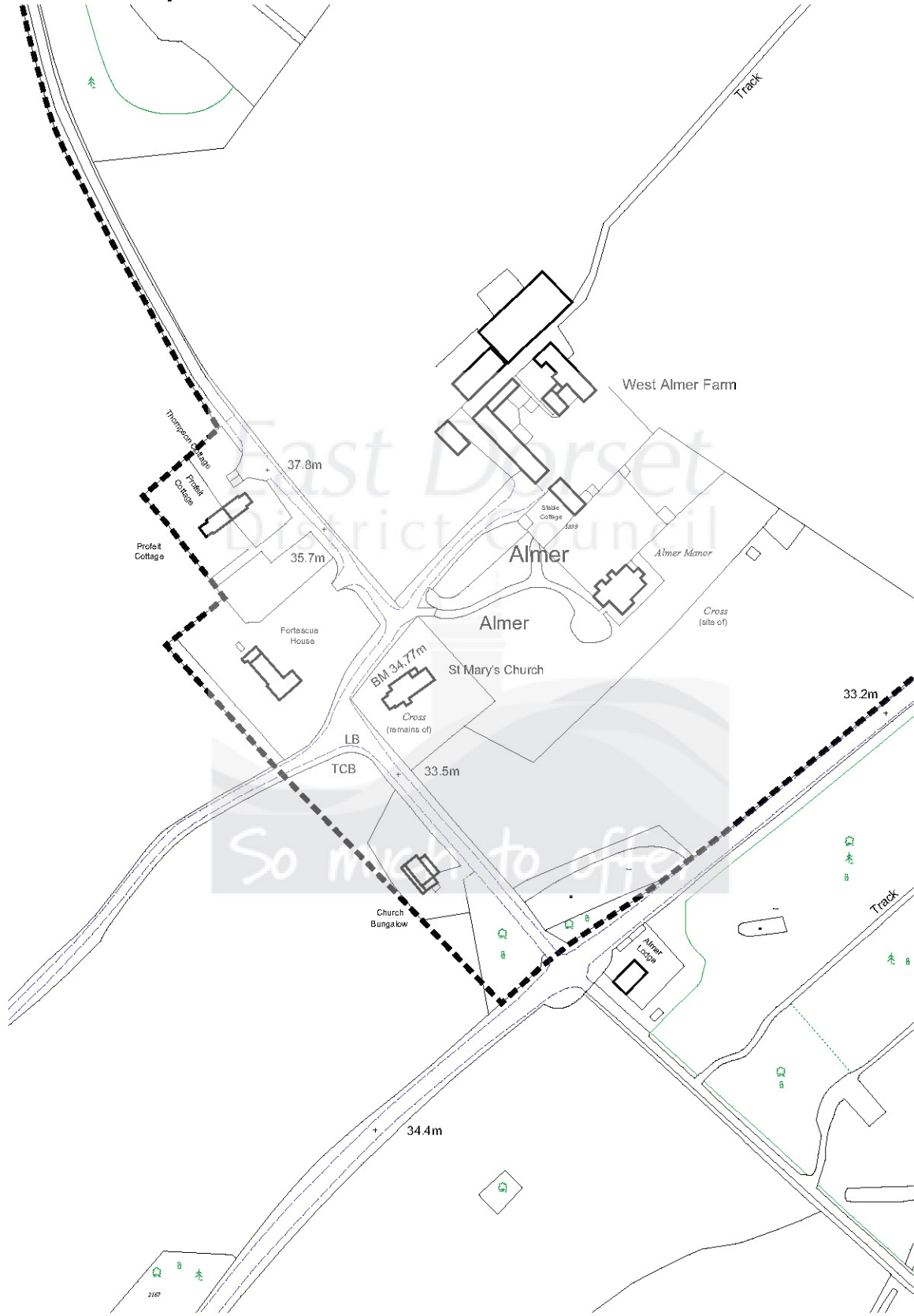
north



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Almer Conservation Area Inset Map

Scale 1:2500 approximately



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Planning Policy in Conservation Areas

East Dorset has many attractive villages of special architectural or historic interest.

In order to protect their character and appearance, the best of these, including the historic centre of Wimborne Minster, have been designated as Conservation Areas by the District Council under Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Under this legislation additional planning controls are exercised by the Council within designated Conservation Areas in order to preserve and enhance those aspects of character and appearance that define an area's special interest.

These include controls over the demolition of most unlisted buildings. An application for Conservation Area Consent is needed for the demolition of an unlisted building in a Conservation Area.

The Council encourages the retention of buildings that make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a Conservation Area. Any proposals which involve demolition of existing buildings will be carefully assessed for their impact upon the character of the area. The local planning authority will also need full details about what is proposed for the site after demolition.

Certain types of development, which elsewhere are normally classified as permitted development (such as the insertion of dormer windows in roof slopes, the erection of satellite dishes on walls, roofs or chimneys fronting a highway) will require planning permission.

Guidance and application forms can be obtained from the Planning and Building Control Division.

Trees

Trees are an invaluable visual asset to the character and setting of many Conservation Areas.

Trees in Conservation Areas may already be protected by a Tree Preservation Order and the Courts can impose heavy fines for unauthorised felling or lopping.

In addition to these controls, and in recognition of the contribution that trees can make to the character and appearance of a Conservation Area special provisions apply to the lopping or felling of other trees which are not otherwise protected. Anyone wishing to fell or lop such trees needs to notify the Council in writing six weeks before carrying out any work.

Householders are also encouraged to seek advice from the Department on the management of their trees. By taking the correct action now mature trees can be made safer and their lives extended.

New Development

When contemplating alterations to existing buildings or the construction of new buildings within a Conservation Area it is advisable to obtain the views of your local Planning Officer at an early stage. The Department is glad to help and the advice is totally impartial and free of charge.

When considering applications for new development, the Council as Local Planning Authority takes particular care to ensure that it fits in satisfactorily with the established character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Positioning, massing, design and choice of materials are of particular importance, as well as the visual impact of 'building over' an area of hitherto open land.

The special character of these areas stem not only from the age, disposition and architectural interest of the buildings, but also from the treatment of the spaces in between.

The presence of gardens, paddocks, soft verges, hedges and old boundary walls contribute greatly to the individual sense of place.

Applications for new development must demonstrate that the proposal will harmonise with the Conservation Area i.e. that it will preserve or enhance its character. Potential applicants are strongly advised to seek proper professional advice.

Therefore when considering such applications the local planning authority will pay particular attention to the following elements of the design:

1. the positioning of the building and its relationship with adjoining buildings, existing trees or other features;
2. the proposed building materials, particularly the walls and roof, and their suitability to the area and in relation to neighbouring buildings;
3. the proportions, mass and scale of the proposal and their relationship with the area in general and adjoining buildings in particular.
4. whether the proposed development might adversely affect existing trees, hedges or other natural features of the site.

In some cases it may be necessary to reproduce an historic style of architecture in order to match existing buildings. Generally, however, the Council encourages new construction to be designed in a modern idiom provided the criteria listed above are applied. Poor copies or imitations of architectural styles detract from the genuine older buildings and are normally discouraged.

Full details of any proposed development must be submitted, showing existing site conditions with the proposals clearly marked. Details of the elevational treatment, including windows and doors, will normally be required. In many instances the planning authority will expect details of hard and soft landscaping including a specification of all the proposed materials.

Conservation Area analysis

The District Council has carried out and published detailed studies of the Conservation Areas to identify those elements which contribute towards the unique character of each area. Any proposal which has an adverse effect on these features will not be permitted. Proposals that can be seen to enhance the Conservation Area will be encouraged.

Grants

Grants may be available from the District Council towards the alleviation of eyesores, or measures that improve the street scene, such as tree-planting, hedging or other boundary treatments. Grants or loans may also be available towards the repair of Listed Buildings, particularly where such repairs make an impact on the Conservation Area.

Design and Conservation Services in East Dorset

Conserving the best features of our environment, our historic towns, villages and countryside, is one of the most important of our planning functions.

Historic Buildings

Our buildings are a record of our architectural and social history. As a society, we hold them in trust for future generations to cherish and enjoy. Investment in our architectural heritage assists local and regional social and economic development

The supply of buildings of the eighteenth century and earlier is finite; once demolished they are lost forever. Others suffer almost the same fate from alterations made without regard to their original design and character.

Historic buildings require special care if their character, which relies upon traditional building materials and practices peculiar to each region, is not to be spoilt by insensitive alterations or inappropriate methods of repair.

Owners of Listed Buildings contemplating altering or extending their building are advised to obtain Guidance Notes obtainable free from the Department.

An important function of the Design and Conservation Section is to advise owners of historic buildings and assist in achieving solutions which preserves their intrinsic interest.

The Section can help seek out the right materials for the job and advise on the correct method of repair.

It can also provide advice on both the law relating to listed buildings and sources of financial assistance.

Conservation Areas

Conservation Areas are groups of buildings, villages or areas of towns having special architectural and townscape interest, the character of which should be preserved and enhanced.

East Dorset has 17 Conservation Areas, which range in size and nature from small villages such as Almer to the historic town centre of Wimborne Minster.

The siting, design and materials of new development, or alterations to existing buildings, are scrutinised by the Department to ensure that the character of such areas are protected.

Since 1980 the Council has invested in a programme of environmental improvements within the centre of Wimborne Minster. The effect of these measures has been to create an attractive place for residents and visitors to shop and to enjoy.

Designated Conservation Areas in East Dorset



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Advice

For advice on any aspect of the Council's building conservation work, the availability of financial assistance or to discuss your individual building, please contact our Design and Conservation Leader Ray Bird, or his assistant Alan Turner on 01202 886201 or e-mail: planning@eastdorset.gov.uk .